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ABSTRACT

Many current social and political developments, such as no-fault divorce and voluntary single motherhood, have systematically eroded the father's role in American family life. In the face of these and other challenges to the traditional concept of fatherhood, an essential question is raised: Why would an American man still want to be a social (e.g., not just a biological) father? This book draws on empirical data from a generation-long cross-cultural study of over 59,000 adult-child groupings from 23 countries, along with biomedical information. The book asserts that there is an adult male-to-child bond that is independent of the man-to-woman bond and the adult female-to-child bond--fathering is an inherent facet of the male's developmental track; and while the "bio" part of the biocultural phenomenon of fathering creates themes of behavioral tendencies, the "cultural" part creates variations around those themes. The book is arranged according to the following topics: (1) the new phenomenon of American children being systematically separated from their fathers (chapter 1); (2) why American men would want to become a social father rather than just a biological father (chapter 2); (3) how fathering behaviors are generated and how they may be studied (chapters 3-5); (4) public images of the American father until the 1970s (chapter 6) and from the 1970s to the 1990s (chapter 7); (5) American fathers in the current and turbulent U.S. megatribe (chapters 8, 10); (6) American fathers compared to other non-American fathers (chapter 9); (7) American fathers in the context of American mothers (chapter 11); and (8) what might be expected of American fathers in the near and not-so-near future (chapters 12-14). Contains an index and approximately 525 references. (EV)

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